

Film claims British threw out Iran hostages

WASHINGTON (UPI) — British diplomats in Tehran, fearing the loss of trade with Iran, forced five American officials seeking asylum to leave their embassy after the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy, a documentary contends.

The producer of "Hostage In Iran," a documentary about the 444-day American hostage crisis, said Sweden and New Zealand also refused sanctuary to the Americans. The five, and a sixth American hiding in the home of a Swedish official, were later protected by Canadian diplomats, and eventually escaped.

The documentary is scheduled to air on Canadian television Monday night, and on the Public Broadcasting Service in the United States Tuesday — the fifth anniversary of the end of the crisis.

"If you're interested in spy stuff, there's a lot of sexy information that has never been released before," said Les Harris, the British-born producer. "For example, before the six Americans got to the Canadians, while they were on the run, the Iranian government knew about it. Bruce Laingen told them."

Laingen was charge d'affaires in Tehran, the senior American official, when the U.S. Embassy was stormed by Iranian students Nov. 4, 1979. He and 51 other Americans were held for more than a year by the students, who planned to occupy the embassy for only a few days but changed their minds after see-

ing the popular support for the seizure, Harris said in an interview last week.

The 52 Americans were held for 444 days before their release Jan. 20, 1981.

In the film, Laingen said several Iranian Foreign Ministry officials knew some Americans were hiding in Tehran even as the 52 hostages were being held.

Harris said the Iranians did not disclose the information because they opposed the seizure of the embassy.

"They were senior diplomats. They opposed the takeover of the embassy because it went against everything that diplomacy was about," Harris said. "So they didn't tell their higher-ups, and that's how they [the Americans] managed to escape."

Harris, a former documentary producer for the British Broadcasting Corp. who has produced two other programs about the Iranian crisis, said several hostages reported the five people under British protection were ordered to leave by British diplomats.

New Zealand and Sweden also refused to help the five or a sixth staying at the home of a Swedish Embassy employee, he said.

"The British were frightened that, if the Americans were caught, the enormous trade between Britain and Iran would have been lost," Harris said. "So they [the Americans] went to the Canadians."

The Weather

Becoming colder today with a mixture of snow and freezing rain. High today in the low-40s, falling to the mid-20s overnight. The high Tuesday will be near 40 degrees.

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The Vindicator

The People's Paper

Final
EDITION



YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

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MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 1986

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